

Roll Your Saving Throw by FindingZ

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Summary:

Her mind has always been a little strange. Strange enough that sometimes she used to think that she wouldn't be much good for anything, ever, that she'd just work her life away in one of those diners where time flows funny. She's wrong, though, and she's adjusting to that.

(or, the "El and the boys are in college and still play D&D together" AU that I've wanted since I finished season 1)

Roll Your Saving Throw

Author's Note:

Once upon a time, I too was a strange little girl with a strange little mind who abruptly found herself enveloped into a group of rambunctious boys and their D&D campaign.

(I guess this counts as fix-it in the sense that they're all in college and of relatively functional mental health and D&D happens and keeps them all together)

It's Saturday again. She rolls onto her back and makes a list. She'll need to get to the pharmacy before it closes at four; she promised Papa she'd call to check in today (she probably won't do that, maybe); she needs to refill her student ID card so she can do laundry; the group meets today.

Oh, of course, she thinks. It's Saturday.

She pours a little more cereal into her last clean mug than she usually does. She's running low on milk; she adds that to her list. She pulls on a day-old shirt and week-old jeans and a sweater (Mike's double that he shares with Lucas is often warm, but she likes to sit in the corner up against the wall and there's a draft that makes her jittery). She checks her phone.

A message from Mike: *are you going to come today??*

yes, she replies, and starts to put her phone down.

cool! dustin is already here so we're just waiting on you!! can you make it over here in fifteen?

ok. She can do that. She had a nightmare again, so she won't be doing homework until her brain cools. She can go early. She'll take her notebook and a pen, in case her mind gets noisy and she needs to fidget. The boys don't care, but *she* She's supposed to show effort in her recovery. She can draw a few stick figures to keep her hands busy.

She goes.

The trek is uneventful. She knocks thrice on Mike's door (Mike-and-Lucas' door, she reminds herself). Mike answers before she can knock a fourth time and says, "hi El! Dustin brought chips!"

"Salt and vinegar?" She asks, because that kind makes her mouth itchy. She rarely eats their snacks, but this is just in case.

"Nah, jus' plain. They were on sale! They expired three weeks ago, so eh, who knows. But like. Ninety-nine cents a bag! You can't beat that."

She needs to go grocery shopping; she adds that to the list and says, "they might taste like shit."

She's inside by that point, and takes her spot in the corner while Mike closes the door. They've shoved a few pillows and blankets her way, to make her corner cozy, and she can see that Will has moved his DM-screen such that she'll still be close enough to reach the dice.

Dustin sits to her right. He always sits to her right. He opens the bag of chips and says, "dear Eleanor, that is a risk I am willing to take, for it is nobler in the mind to suffer for eating bad chips than not eating them."

(Dustin is the only one who can call her Eleanor)

Will takes his place behind the DM-screen. "Everyone remember where we left off?"

"Yes." She does. Lucas' character had been killed, left to bleed out on the battlefield while they all fought for their lives. She had tried to save him.

"Yeah, Lucas got fucked over by the golem. Is he still off sulking?"

The boys chat amongst themselves. She sits and listens. She rarely says anything - can't, sometimes, when her brain is all fuzzy and her hands would rather speak instead - but when she does, she enjoys being able to reroute entire conversations with a few words. Having a character to play is nice, too - even when her brain is foggy and full of lightning, she can still pretend to be someone else.

It's fun.

Will has dark puddles under his eyes again. She knows he has nightmares of the accident, still. He told her once in passing that he remembers lying on the leaf litter on the side of the road and hearing the ambulance in the distance. He told her that he remembers trying to stay awake. He doesn't remember anything after that.

Will is likely not sleeping. He takes too many credits in order to make himself concentrate on other things, so he has to pull himself out of bed in the morning with no time to think about what his mind cooked up in the night.

He texts her, sometimes, at early hours when he knows she'll be awake. Asks things like, *am I real right now?* or *can I come over?* and she'll always answer *yes, yes*, and lay out a sleeping bag at the foot of her bed. She has no roommate because the school listened when she said she didn't know if she could handle one (still doesn't think she can, even now), but she can handle Will. Will is easy. Will is like her, has a brain like hers (*nobody has a brain quite like yours, sweet-pea*, Papa used to say), and she can let her brain be her brain even if he's around.

It's nice.

"I am *not* sulking." Lucas declares, wrestling with the bag of chips. "It's called taking character creation *seriously*."

"Yeah because spending the rest of the session mournfully look at Facebook is so important to roleplaying - "

"I was trying to open the door," she interrupts. "The protected one."

Will flips through his notes. "Oh yeah, that's right. You all did your eight hours when the combat was over, right?"

"Yeah," says Dustin, his mouth full of chips.

"Yeah, so El you can just prepare the spells you need now."

"Okay."

"Lucas had the thing!" Crows Dustin. "Did we get it off his body?"

"El, do you have it?"

"No," she says, and goes back to her spell list.

"Lucas' body is still there, right?"

"I fucking hope so," says Lucas. He's on his phone, but not yet on Facebook.

"Yes, it is."

"Cool, so I grab the thing, the, the, what was it, amulet of - "

"The Amulet of Lost Souls."

"Right, yeah. So I try to find out what it does."

"El has higher spellcraft."

"I'm busy."

"I technically have ranks, it's all good."

"Dude, you have *one* rank." Lucas grabs four d6s and a blank piece of paper to start his new character.

(El is planning on resurrecting his old one, but she hasn't told Lucas yet. Will and Mike know, though, so they won't let anything happen to the body in the meantime)

"It still counts! All ya'll haters, you're killin' me."

Will looks surprisingly indifferent. "Roll, then."

El goes back to her list. The clatter of dice is not immediately followed by proclamations of joy, so she doesn't bother to look up.

"...Nine?"

"With or without the modifier?"

"...Yeah."

"No good." Says Will, and scribbles a note.

"Fine, then I use-magic-device the shit outta it."

"You have three ranks in that."

"Shut up, Lucas! A fuckin' dream-killer, Jesus. I'm gonna try!"

Will taps his pencil on the table surface near her. "Are you going to step in, El?"

"No." Dustin makes things interesting even when there aren't complicated plots or scheming villains. She rather hopes he fails his check, just to see what happens.

(she knows what the amulet does - she looked it up last week. It's not that interesting, honestly. Not interesting enough that she's motivated to try it out right this second)

"Aw, *bro* - "

"She said no, just roll the die." Will leans forward in his seat, palms flat on the table.

"Dustin, seriously - "

Dustin claps his hand over his heart and looks at Mike woefully. "Not you too, Mike! Be still my heart, I have been betrayed by my own fellowship, leaving me with but one choice! Onwards, noble die!" He rolls.

It's a natural one.

There's a pause, and then -

"Ohhhhhhhh *shit*, son!" Mike slams his palms on the table. "Dude, you're fucked."

"You shoulda just let El do it." Lucas goes back to scribbling on his new character sheet.

"I looked it up," she admits. Feels like she should reveal her sort-of lie. "It's not really a good amulet anyway."

"Hey hey hey, metagaming! Willlllll - "

"Roll for effects," says Will, and gives her a small little smile. She rests her head on her arms on the table while Dustin fishes for the correct dice.

She's so tired. She can't remember if she dreamed anything last night - woke up with this weird sense of not belonging, so she probably had a nightmare. She isn't really sure if she's glad that she can't remember it.

Will flips through some papers. "Let's see...here we go. "Target's personal gravity becomes reversed for 2d6 hours."

"*Personal* gravity?"

"Aw, dude, good thing we're inside." Mike chews on the eraser of her second-favorite communal pencil. It's the one that sharpens the best. Are pencils washable? He's been sick recently, and she can't afford to catch anything at this point in the semester.

"Wait, so I'm, like, stuck to the ceiling?"

"Yup. Roll for the duration."

"In *hours*?"

"You done hecked the frick up, Dusty. El, pass me Complete Warrior. Please."

(she's been training Lucas to ask her nicely. She makes and holds eye contact before handing him the book)

(*don't do anything for anyone who doesn't say please, sweet-pea*, said Papa, who would always say *please, sweet-pea*)

(*look where that got you*, she thinks, and feels her jaw tighten)

"...Eleven."

"What?"

"Better get comfy up there." Will is trying not to look pleased.

"Wait, does this mean we have to wait eleven hours for him to come down so we can leave?"

"Unless you have ropes to tie him down, yup."

"Dude, *c'mon* - "

"Shut up, Mike! If there hadn't been mutiny in the ranks I wouldn't be up here in the first place!"

"Guys," she whispers. They hear her anyway, which is nice. "The rest of the dungeon."

"Wait, does personal gravity mean my stuff, too?"

"Ummm, hm." Will flips a few pages. "It doesn't say otherwise, so, yeah? I guess?"

"Oh, so he can still fight," says Mike. "Cool. We can just keep going, then."

"I don't have any ranged weapons."

"What's your jump?"

"Huh?"

Mike leans forward and interlaces his fingers. "Will, the ceiling is, what, like twelve feet up or so?"

"Somewhere around there, yeah."

"So just make jump checks every round when we get into a fight."

"I have a potion," she decides to put in. "From that fight with the hobgoblins."

"Oh, Dusty my dude, buddy, ol' pal, you gotta do that."

"It's not gonna work reliably."

"Well, duh. But it'll be funny."

Will and Mike both turn to look at her.

"I don't need it. Dustin can have it."

"See? It's a great idea. Just take it."

"I throw it up to him." El intones, and looks to Will to see if he deems it worthy of a strength check.

"Dustin, write the jump potion on your sheet," he says, and starts tugging on his fingers to pop the joints. "By the way, Mike, roll a listen check."

A collective groan goes around the table.

"I *told* ya'll you were gonna get ambushed if you hung around too long!"

"Shut up Lucas, I'm trying to concentrate! Uh...nineteen?"

"You hear a faint shuffling noise from behind the door you came in through."

"What about the shielded door?" She still isn't done preparing her spells. There's a lot of things to consider, obviously.

"From the noise Mike heard, it seems to you that you'll have to deal with the door later. There's no noise from behind it that you can hear." Says Will, which is a good enough answer for her. She swaps out two divination spells for more useful, burn-things-to-cinders spells.

Dustin cracks his knuckles. "*Oh!* Imma ambush this bitch. Uh...what's the terrain of the ceiling?"

"Your movement isn't hindered by being upside down, Dustin."

"Nice, okay, Mike, throw me up anything heavy and I'll just drop it on this sucker."

"You don't know that the source of the sound is hostile."

"You wouldn't make me roll if it wasn't!" Mike insists. "I got, uh...hm. Will, how much gold am I carrying?"

"Ten-K or thereabouts. And *no*, you can't drop the bag of gold on him. You would literally be suffocated by your own backpack if you didn't have it in the bag of holding, anyway."

"But like, what if we just siphoned some off and put it in a boot or something?"

El knows what's on the other side of the door. She may have gotten a glimpse of Will's stat sheet when she'd come in. It's two skeletons in light armor. She highly doubts that a shoe full of money would make for an effective surprise round.

"I cast detect undead," she announces.

Will gives her a side-eye (oops, he probably guessed that she peeked). "You sense undead in the area."

Pleased, she leans back from the table. She doesn't need to do more than that - Mike, Dustin, and Lucas have already switched conversational directions.

"*Ohhhh* it's undead? Well, shit. Good thinking, El. So, okay..."

It goes on. It turns out there is, in fact, only one skeleton behind the door. They find a few more in other areas of the dungeon, but nothing as dangerous as the golem from before. When Dustin's enchantment wears off, Will makes him roll for falling damage and pronounces that he breaks his ankle. it doesn't matter, really, because she patches him right up and he's good to go again, but it does delay them a little bit.

They leave the dungeon, and Will tells them the sun is setting, says it's the brightest pink and orange and red they've ever seen.

"And on that note, we should probably stop here."

"What time is it?" She has to get her list done before Monday. She tends to neglect it on weeks where D&D happens.

"Oh, shit, it's already two!"

"Comstock is open. We can get lunch," she says. She doesn't like the Comstock dining hall (too loud, too bright, too many chairs around

each small table), but she never minds it if the boys are with her.

"Ehhhhh, but do we wanna walk?" Dustin stretches, scrubs his hands through his hair.

"Dude, the menu says Indian food! I'm goin'." Lucas has already brought up the dining app on his phone.

"'Indian' food."

"But *naan*!"

Will finishes gathering up all his dice. "I'm up for that, if you guys want to go."

"I'm game," says Dustin. "I guess. They'll have that mango stuff if it's Indian, right? Or, 'Indian'?"

"Probably not." El says. "That's only for special occasions."

"They'll probably have ice cream out, stop whining. I'm going, so ya'll can come with or not."

"I'm coming."

"I knew *you're* coming, El, I was talking to Will."

"Yeah, just gimme a sec." Will is hopping around, trying to put on his sneakers without untying the laces first. He's near the overflowing laundry hamper, dangerously close, and he's a little off-balance, and -

She's there to catch him before he registers that he's falling.

"Uh, thanks." He gives her a shy little smile.

(she's very fast, when she wants to be. Sometimes so fast that it scares people)

"Don't fucking kill yourself, dude. C'mon, I'm hungry."

"You weren't in a hurry thirty seconds ago!"

They bicker until Will has locked his door behind him, until they've reached the stairwell and Mike starts jumping down the steps two at a time. Mike won't fall - El knows he won't. She doesn't have to pay attention to him.

Comstock is loud and bright and noisy, but so are the boys, and she doesn't mind them. They drown everything else out. El eats mostly naan and some rice with chicken, and she's happy.

She's *happy*. She doesn't know her brain will do tomorrow, but right now, she's happy.

That's enough.